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JAN PATOČKA'S NON-POLITICAL POLITICS

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907–1977) and his approach to politics. The article follows Miloš Havelka's thesis that Patočka's approach to politics can be understood within the concept of non-political politics as it has been developed in the Czech lands since the 19th century. In order to elaborate and further develop Havelka's argument, the article puts Patočka's public and civic activities, especially his participation in the Czechoslovak civic initiative Charter 77, in the context of his philosophical thought as well as in the socio-political circumstances of former Czechoslovakia. More precisely, Patočka's understanding of politics is interpreted with regards to his philosophical concept of the spiritual person, which he developed throughout his career, beginning in the 1930s. At the same time, Patočka's attempt to formulate his own approach to politics is seen as a critique of the servile and opportunist attitude taken by some members of the Czechoslovak intellectual elite during the period known as normalisation, in the 1970s. In this way, the concept of non-political politics can be seen as a point of intersection of Patočka's philosophical work and his public activities.

Forty years after his death, interpreting Jan Patočka's life and work remains a challenge. One of the most striking questions is the link between Patočka's philosophical work, which he developed gradually from the 1930s onwards, and his participation in the Czechoslovak human rights initiative Charter 77, which he joined in the 1970s. However, connecting these two lines can prove more difficult than it seems at first.

For most of his life, Patočka did not seem to have any aspirations to act in a public position, join civic movements, or even participate in politics. This does not mean that he ignored the social and political circumstances of his time – many notes in his philosophical writings, private correspondence and recorded inter-

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views prove that the opposite was true[1] –, nevertheless, as far as we know, he did not partake in any kind of protest activities in public until the 1970s.

Patočka's philosophical journey began in the mid-1920s. He began his studies in philosophy and Roman and Slavic philology at Charles University in Prague, but philosophy soon became his main concern. After encountering Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, he focused primarily on phenomenology. The depth of Patočka's interest in philosophy is indisputable. One could even say that he attempted to do philosophy despite all the obstacles the 20th century put in his way. Spending most of his life in Czechoslovakia, Patočka had to face the Munich agreement (1938) and the Nazi invasion (1939), the Communist takeover (1948) and the Soviet invasion (1968). All these historical events had a crucial impact on Patočka's academic career – he was only allowed to teach or study at university level between the years 1925–1939, 1945–1950 and 1968–1972,[2] and he was often banned from publishing. Nevertheless, despite all these obstacles, Patočka always tried to find a way to continue his work – for example by giving lectures at home seminars, publishing his works in samizdat or exile editions, maintaining a correspondence with his colleagues abroad and the like. In this light, Patočka seemed to represent the kind of thinker who was always primarily focused on his philosophical work.[3]

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1 For example, Patočka's interest in politics can be traced to his works from the 1950s as well as the 1960s – e.g., see his reflection of the Cold War in his study *Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt* (*Supercivilization and Its Inner Conflict*) written in the early 1950s (Patočka Jan, "La surcivilisation et son conflit interne", *in* Patočka J., *Liberté et sacrifice*, Grenoble, J. Millon, 1999, pp. 99–177) or his reflection of the political liberalisation of the 1960s, presented in a book of essays titled *O smysl dneška* (*On the Meaning of Today*) (Patočka Jan, "O smysl dneška", *in* Patočka, J., *Češi I*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky 12, 2006, pp. 231–338). Interest in politics is also often discernible in Patočka's private notes and correspondence – for example, see the way in which Patočka discusses the contemporary political situation in the 1940s and 50s in his notes and diaries (see the notes that Patočka made between the years 1948 and 1950 in his unpublished diaries archived at The Jan Patočka Archive in Prague) or in the letters addressed to Václav Richter (e.g., Patočka Jan, "17. Dopis 4/52, Praha 30. 11. 1952", *in* Patočka J., *Dopisy Václavu Richterovi*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky 20, 2001, p. 47f.). Finally, Patočka himself reflects his interest in politics in his own reminiscences. See, for example Patočka's remarks on his stay in Berlin in the 1930s, which, according to his own words, awoke his interest in politics (Patočka Jan, Zumr Josef, "K filosofovým šedesátinám. S Janem Patočkou o filosofii a filosofech", *in* Patočka J., *Češi I*, *op. cit.*, p. 614).

2 The first period also covers the time of Patočka's studies at Charles University, as well as his stays abroad in France (1928–1929) and Germany (1932–1933). Concerning the third period, it is necessary to add that in the 1960s, Patočka gradually began teaching abroad (e.g., Mainz, Köln, Leuven) as well as in Czechoslovakia (Praha, Brno), even before 1968 – but only as an adjunct professor.

3 See a basic overview of Patočka's curriculum vitae: Archiv Jana Patočky, *Biochronologie*, http://ajp.cuni.cz/index.php/Biochronologie (20. 12. 2017). See also Patočka's biography by Ivan Blecha: Blecha Ivan, *Jan Patočka*, Olomouc, Votobia, 1997.

On the other hand, public activities and active protests against the Czechoslovak authorities also entered Patočka's life. In the 1970s, Patočka, who was forced to retire in 1972, gradually began publicly demonstrating his disobedience and protest against the Czechoslovak authorities: For example, in 1973, Patočka travelled on his own, against the will of the Czechoslovak authorities and separately from the official Czechoslovak delegation, to the XVth World Congress of Philosophy in Varna, Bulgaria.[4] In 1975, Patočka visited the West German embassy, where he received his "doctor honoris causa", awarded by the RWTH Aachen University.[5] In 1976, Patočka signed a letter of protest which criticised the imprisonment of members of the Czechoslovak underground music group Plastic People of the Universe.[6] Finally, in 1977, Patočka became a signatory and spokesman of the civic movement known as Charter 77 (Charta 77). His most prominent public appearance took place on the 1st of March 1977, when he joined a press conference with the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, Max van der Stoel.[7] As the archival documents of the Czechoslovak secret police (Statní bezpečnost) illustrate, the publication of Charter 77 as well as the press conference was followed by many police interrogations, during which Patočka explicitly refused to cooperate.[8]

Thus, Patočka became one of the symbols of the Czechoslovak dissent, a true philosopher, who, following the Socratic example, was not only a scholar, a wise man sitting in his tower, but also an active citizen who transformed his philosophical ideas into real actions.[9] Nevertheless, it remains unclear why these activities only became part of Patočka's life in the 1970s and not earlier.

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4 Some of the circumstances were described by Patočka himself in one of his letters to Ludwig Landgrebe (see Patočka's letter to Langrebe from 3./4. October 1973 in The Jan Patočka Archive in Prague). See also Patočka's "Varna lecture", which was not included in the official conference proceedings (Patočka Jan, "Die Gefahren der Technisierung in der Wissenschaft bei Edmund Husserl und das Wesen der Technik als Gefahr bei Martin Heidegger", *in* Patočka J., *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991, pp. 330–353).

5 Blažek Petr (ed.), *Kéž je to všecko ku prospěchu obce! Jan Patočka v dokumentech StB*, Praha, OIKOYMENH/Academia, 2017, p. 95f.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 121f., 133f.

7 See the recording of the discussion between Patočka and Max van der Stoel: *Jan Patočka a Max van der Stoel – audio záznam setkání z 1. 3. 1977, Hotel Intercontinental*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNaCP4fKFuk (20. 12. 2017).

8 Blažek Petr (ed.), *Kéž je to všecko ku prospěchu obce! Jan Patočka v dokumentech StB*, *op. cit.*, pp. 437–470.

9 Patočka's engagement in the Czech dissent as well as his approach to politics in general has been the subject of many works – see, for example: Bělohradský Václav, *Přirozený svět jako politický problém: Eseje o člověku pozdní doby,* Praha, Československý spisovatel, 1991; Tucker Aviezer, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidents. From Patočka to Havel*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000; Bolton Jonathan, *Worlds of Dissent*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2012, see especially

The importance of these questions has been underlined by the most recent literature on Patočka's work. For example, James Mensch's *Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights* (2016) and Francesco Tava's *The Risk of Freedom: Ethics, Phenomenology and Politics in Jan Patočka* (2015) more or less outline the same problem – the link between Patočka's philosophical work and his participation in Charter 77.[10] Whilst Mensch focuses on Patočka's conception of asubjective phenomenology, which Patočka began developing in the 1960s, Tava goes even farther and attempts "to consider ethics as a useful middle point between the various areas investigated by Patočka in his works".[11] Both authors suggest that Patočka's political engagement in the 1970s, i.e., his participation in Charter 77, was no mere coincidence, because the idea of human rights, as defended by the Czechoslovak dissidents, corresponded precisely to Patočka's own philosophical heritage.

Particularly the attempts to explain Patočka's participation in Charter 77 call for a more concrete definition of his relation to politics. However, despite the fact that Tava in particular makes Patočka's understanding of politics one of his main concerns, there is one crucial term that the recent works fail to mention. This article argues that Patočka himself provided a relatively clear definition of his own relation to politics, which corresponds to his philosophical heritage as well as to his participation in the human rights initiative and in public affairs in general. As the Czech sociologist Miloš Havelka noted in the 1990s, Patočka's approach corresponds to the concept of "non-political politics". Moreover, Havelka shows that Patočka's understanding of non-political politics, grounded in his analysis of human existence, can be considered part of a tradition of Czech political thinking that has developed since the 19th century.[12]

Therefore, following Havelka's thesis, this article wants to contribute to the present discussion by highlighting Patočka's understanding of non-political poli-

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pp. 155–160; Tava Francesco, Meacham Darian (eds.), *Thinking After Europe. Jan Patočka and Politics*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.

10 Mensch James, *Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, Orbis Phaenomenologicus: Studien 38, 2016, pp. 11–23, 145–157; Tava Francesco, *The Risk of Freedom: Ethics, Phenomenology and Politics in Jan Patočka*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, pp. 137–146.

11 *Ibid*., p. viii.

12 Miloš Havelka's article on non-political politics was originally published in Czech in 1998 (Havelka Miloš, "'Nepolitická politika': kontexty a tradice", *in Sociologický časopis*, 34, 4, 1998, pp. 455–466). In 2014, a revised version was published in German (Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989. Zu Bedeutungsverschiebung eines alten Konzepts", *in* Luft Robert, Havelka Miloš, Zwicker Stefan (eds.), *Zivilgesellschaft und Menschenrechte im östlichen Mitteleuropa*, Göttingen/Bristol, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, pp. 31–50.

tics. Firstly, my aim is to introduce Havelka's own interpretation, which represents probably the first, or at least the most important elaboration of this issue. After that, I will go beyond Havelka's work and provide my own analysis of Patočka's understanding of non-political politics, emphasising the philosophical roots of Patočka's approach as well as its socio-political contexts.

Havelka's Thesis: Patočka as a Representative of Non-Political Politics

In recent years, the concept of non-political politics has become a point of debate. As Miloš Havelka noticed, this is due to the changes of the modern world, such as the decreasing power of nation states in favour of multinational corporations – despite the fact that nation states still retain their political functions, it sometimes seems as though real decisions are made by the economic elites who follow their own best interests. At the same time, standard politics seems to have been replaced by bureaucrats, experts, economists, technocrats of power and the like. Moreover, one could even say that the term "politics" has become something unwanted and compromised, something often despised and abandoned not only by the public, but also by politicians themselves. These kinds of changes have gradually brought about the feeling that politics in the traditional sense of the word are about to disappear. Instead, new forms of political life are arising. In order to explain this changing reality, the term "non-political politics" is one of the theoretical concepts that are applied. However, it has to be taken into account that the term has its own history and very specific meaning.[13]

Havelka emphasises that the concept of non-political politics has to be distinguished from similar yet different terms such as a-politics and anti-politics. The term non-political politics represents neither an overall rejection of politics (a-politics) nor an attempt to replace the existing forms of politics by new ways of ruling, based on "intellectual humanist", "populist" or "managerial-technocratic" principles (anti-politics).[14] Instead, non-political politics represents an attempt to develop a "prepolitical sphere", i.e., a "sphere of civil activity, of cultivating the

[13] Havelka Miloš, "'Apolitics', 'Anti-politics', 'Non-political Politics' and 'Sub-politics' as Threats and Challenges", *in Sociální studia / Social Studies*, 1, 2016, pp. 9–22.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 12f., 18f. It is necessary to add that in the older versions of his thesis – those written in Czech (1998) and German (2014) – Havelka does not distinguish precisely between the terms "non-political politics" and "anti-politics" – the terms sometimes – especially in the context of Václav Havel's legacy – seem to be interchangeable, or at least very close to each other; that is not the case of Havelka's article written later in English (2016), in which a clear distinction between both terms was emphasised.

public, of demands for political literacy and culture, and so on".[15] From this point of view, some aspects of non-political politics could also be represented by the concept of "sub-politics" (or a plurality of "life politics"), which is characterised by the rejection of the traditional tension between private and public and by an emphasis on the influences working outside the traditional parties, i.e., in public, in communities, within movements, etc.[16]

In this light, it could seem that the term non-political politics corresponds to what has already been covered by the concept of civil society.[17] In order to explain the difference, a more detailed analysis of the concept is required. Havelka stresses the tradition of non-political politics that has developed in the Czech lands beginning in the 19th century.[18] Its crucial formulations can be found in the heritage of two famous historical figures – the first Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937) and his successor and also the first president of independent Czech Republic, Václav Havel (1936–2011). Both faced a situation in which people felt certain obstacles – or even an impossibility – to properly participate in politics.

Masaryk's approach to politics was rooted in the situation of the stateless Central European nations that could not properly express their own national, economic, and foreign policy interests. Masaryk's program of Czech national politics, most notably outlined in his book *The Czech Question* (*Česká otázka*, 1895),[19] was, therefore, based on the idea of going beyond mere politics and developing the pre-political sphere. He emphasised what he called "small acts" for the nation. By this term, Masaryk showed that, regardless of the official authorities, the Czech nation could work for itself. More specifically, he focused on the socialisation of the nation and on constructing a Czech identity, one which was to be based on the growth of education, moral cultivation, personal and civic responsibility, the primacy of humanism before low-minded nationalism, and so on. The concept of non-political politics, as identified in Masaryk's approach, could thus be understood as an important cultural assumption and precondition for political politics, i.e, standard party politics.[20]

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15 *Ibid*., p. 18.

16 *Ibid*., p. 16.

17 Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit.*, p. 46.

18 Havelka Miloš, "'Apolitics', 'Anti-politics', 'Non-political Politics' and 'Sub-politics' as Threats and Challenges", *op. cit.*, p. 15f.; Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit.*, p. 36f.

19 Masaryk Tomáš G., "Česká otázka", *in* Masaryk T. G., *Česká otázka. Naše nynější krize. Jan Hus*, Praha, Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2000, pp. 9–163.

20 Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit.*, p. 38f.; Havelka Miloš, "'Apolitics', 'Anti-politics', 'Non-political Politics' and 'Sub-politics' as Threats and Challenges", *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Václav Havel's approach, similarly to Masaryk's, arose from a situation in which standard politics were impossible. But Havel's time was much darker. The Czechoslovak normalisation period was characterised by a complete liquidation and deflation of politics. Therefore, Havel experienced a situation in which even a simple, common activity – such as a concert, art exhibition, or religious service – could be considered a political act.[21] Havel himself claims that his usage of the term non-political politics was an attempt to define the character of dissident activities, which were not intended to compete over executive power, but at the same time still had a certain political impact.[22] According to Havelka, this also explains the difference between non-political politics and civil society. The situation of the Czechoslovak dissent illustrates that the sphere of non-political politics is not a part of civil society – instead, it is a reaction to its absence. Non-political politics arises where civil society is lacking, and where defense against the official authorities is needed.[23]

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[21] Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit.*, p. 43; Havelka Miloš, "'Nepolitická politika': kontexty a tradice", *op. cit.*, p. 461f. In order to illustrate this situation, Havelka refers to Václav Havel's words, presented in an interview with Ivan Lamper for the samizdat journal *Sport* in 1989: "Even though I feel like I'll say something I've already said many times, my answer will be similar: for forty years, we've seen a liquidation of politics as a specific discipline of human activity. People only imagine Jakeš or Štěpán and their long TV speeches when they hear the word, some boring, interminable phrase, and they think – this politics, it's some crap! But the boring keepers of this governorate are no politicians, they have merely been trying to eradicate politics for the last forty years. And we all, after all these years, discover that you simply cannot eradicate it. You chase it out the door and it comes back through the window. It might have been cancelled as a discipline of human activity, but it then spilled into the general social surroundings, so you suddenly find that a rock concert, a mass or an exhibition can be political. Everything is kind of semi-political, crypto-political, everything gets a political flavour. And when a writer spends his life writing what he thinks and speaking the truth as he sees it regardless of whether the government likes this or not – and it usually doesn't – then this of course becomes a political phenomenon *par excellence*." (Havel Václav, "Terén, na který nikdy nevstoupím (rozhovor s Václavem Havlem)", *in Sport*, 1, n.3, 1989, p. 6f; see the transcription online: https://www.rozhovoryvh.cz/cs/id/29) (20. 12. 2017). Translation by Ian Mikyska.

[22] Havel Václav, "Ztráta paměti", *in Lidové noviny*, 13. 9., 1994, online: http://vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky&val=33_clanky.html&typ=HTML (20. 12. 2017); see also: Havel Václav, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central Eastern Europe*, Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 1985, pp. 23–96, part XI.

[23] Cf. Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit.*, p. 46; Havelka Miloš, "'Nepolitická politika': kontexty a tradice", *op. cit*., p. 461f. In these passages, Havelka compares the term "civil society" with the concept of "anti-politics" rather than "non-political politics" – however, as mentioned above, in his Czech and German texts, Havelka sometimes did not emphasise the difference between anti-/non-political politics, and, therefore, in the very passages that elaborate the idea of civil society, the term anti-politics seems to correspond to what is meant by the concept of non-political politics.

Crucially, Havelka points out that Havel – who was using terms such as "existential revolution"[24] – was trying to root his understanding of politics in existential experience. Havelka underlines that this specific aspect of Havel's approach was inspired by Jan Patočka. More precisely, Havel followed Patočka's effort to ground politics in the experience of existential "shaking" (*otřesení*). According to Patočka, this experience, inspired by Heidegger's analysis of "anxiety" (*Angst*), opens up the possibility of gaining distance from the naively accepted meaning of life in favour of its problematisation. Politics – as well as philosophy – express this experience of life in problematicity. Referring mostly to the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* and to the lecture *The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual*, Havelka shows that Patočka captures his existential grounding of politics especially in the concepts of "historicity" and "the spiritual person".[25]

In this light, Havelka underlines that Patočka's contribution to the development of the concept of non-political politics lies in his emphasis on its existential grounding – it is based on an authentic openness to the problematicity of human life. Nevertheless, Havelka's interpretation calls for a more precise discussion of Patočka's approach: firstly, a more detailed elaboration of the concept of the spiritual person is required, especially with regard to the broader framework of Patočka's thought. Only within this framework can the link between the spiritual person and non-political politics be properly understood. Secondly, Havelka pays no attention to the specific circumstances of the 1970s that led Patočka to re-visit his concept of the spiritual person. However, only after explaining these socio-political contexts can Patočka's own turn to non-political politics, as realised in Charter 77, be explained.

The Concept of the Spiritual Person

The idea of the spiritual person (*duchovní člověk*), spiritual being (*duchovní bytost*) or spiritual life (*duchovní život*) was first articulated at the very beginning of Patočka's philosophical career. It is rooted in Patočka's interest in the term "spirit" (*duch*).[26] Referring to different cultural sources of the term, including Greek phi-

[24] Havel Václav, *The Power of the Powerless*, *op. cit*., part XX, XXI.

[25] Havelka Miloš, "Nichtpolitische Politik vor und nach 1989…", *op. cit*., p. 47f.; see also: Havelka Miloš, "'Nepolitická politika': kontexty a tradice", *op. cit*., p. 464f.

[26] A remark on terminology: the Czech term "duchovní člověk" is translated as "spiritual person", which can be problematic, as the religious connotations of the term "spiritual" may be too strong; in Czech, the term "duchovní" represents a more general attitude towards life, which can have

losophy, the Christian tradition or Continental Philosophy, Patočka shows that the "spirit" does not denote mere intellect – instead it refers to some kind of existential change, life-turn, life-renewal, life-conversion and the like.[27] And this very idea of conversion is of crucial importance. But Patočka has to specify its meaning in his own manner. One of the first analyses of this issue can be found in the article *Der Geist und die zwei Grundschichten der Intentionalität* from 1936. Patočka, referring to the concept of the universal horizon of human life, introduces the idea that man can become a spiritual being by overcoming a life interested only in its particular impulses, and by confronting himself with the world as a whole. Crucially, Patočka shows that this kind of conversion can be realised in different spheres of spiritual activity – he mentions art, religion and philosophy.[28]

Patočka's concept can be further explained on the example of philosophy, which represents a case of spiritual life *par excellence*. During the 1930s, Patočka repeatedly emphasised that philosophy should not be understood as merely an intellectual activity or academic occupation. Instead, he underlines its existential grounding. Philosophy is a way of life. It is based on a conversion, usually arising from some extraordinary, shaking experience, which leads one to a decision to leave the safe yet naive understanding of life and its meaning and to live in problematicity. Moreover, such a decision is irreversible and can even call for personal sacrifice.[29]

The grounding of spiritual life – the conversion – was further developed in Patočka's analysis of human existence. Its most important formulation represents the theory of existential movement, gradually developed and rethought during the 1960s and 70s. In brief, Patočka argues that our relation to the world can be understood in terms of movement. Human life as such is then realised in three movements, in three mutually interconnected possibilities of our existence, derived from its temporality: In the first movement, we enter the world, we are accepted by others, we anchor ourselves in what has already been here before us (past). In the second movement, we prolong ourselves, we have to take care of ourselves, which means to satisfy our needs, to work, to understand

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a religious aspect, but not exclusively – it also describes philosophical, artistic, and other attitudes. Nevertheless, it seems that English gives us no better term than "spiritual".

27 Patočka Jan, "Nitro a duch", *in* Patočka J., *Fenomenologické spisy III/1*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky 8/1, 2014, p. 23f.

28 Patočka Jan, "Der Geist und die zwei Grundschichten der Intentionalität", *in* Patočka J., *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz,* Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991, pp. 33–42.

29 See, for example: Patočka Jan, "Some Comments Concerning the Extramundane and Mundane Position of Philosophy", *in* Patočka J., *Living in Problematicity*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, 2007, pp. 18–28.

the world in the form of objects, to compete with others and so on (present). In the third movement, the movement of existence in the narrow sense of the word, we finally realise our own finitude – we overcome the boundary of the first two movements and relate to the world as a whole (future).[30] In this light, Patočka remarks that the third movement "is the most important, the most humanly significant of the three" and, therefore, "counterbalances the first two and maintains them in upswing as a mere possibility, which is not the full reality of human existence".[31]

Thus the third movement – introduced under various terms, such as "movement of existence", "breakthrough of freedom", or "movement of truth" – represents the possibility of undergoing a conversion. The life-changing experience, previously discussed in the case of the spiritual person, is now elaborated in the more general terms of an analysis of human existence. In order to describe the shaking character of this experience, Patočka uses terms such as "earthquake" and "avalanche". These metaphors also mirror the overcoming of the first two movements, which are seen as binding us to the Earth: "The very ground, the earth on which it was standing has quaked. If man himself is correctly described as an earthling, earth within him undergoes a quake. (…) Once the avalanche gets moving, however, nothing can stop it. Earth and heaven lose their power."[32]

Moreover, by referring to multiple examples – such as the Buddhist overcoming of thirst and the Christian overcoming of the self-enclosure of the individual – Patočka shows that the situations and ways in which we break free of the limits established by the first two movements can have various historical forms.[33] The concept of existential movement is thus linked to the problem of history. More precisely, Patočka presents the thesis that history could be analysed in the terms of the three movements – we should focus on the way in which these movements "presuppose and negate each other mutually" and "make up the overarching human movement we call history".[34] Similarly, Patočka claims

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30 Patočka Jan, "On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement: World, Earth, Heaven and the Movement of Human Life", *in* Schuback Marcia Sá Cavalcante, Lane Tora (eds.), *Dis-orientations: Philosophy, Literature and the Lost Grounds of Modernity*, London/New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2014, pp. 69–78.

31 Patočka Jan, "'The Natural World' Remeditated Thirty-Three Years Later", *in* Patočka J., *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, Evanston/Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2016, p. 175.

32 Patočka Jan, "On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement…", *op. cit.*, p. 75f.

33 Patočka Jan, *Body, Community, Language, World*, Chicago/LaSalle (Illinois), Open Court, 1998, p. 160f.

34 *Ibid*., p. 161.

that the conversion isn't only a matter of "individual life" – it can also be a matter of the "life of humankind".[35]

This analysis is finally realised in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (*Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, 1975). Patočka, dividing history into nonhistorical, prehistorical and historical epochs, shows that history itself begins at first in the moment when the experience of shaking, as analysed in the third movement, is not refused, but treated as a challenge.[36] In other words, history begins when man, instead of merely accepting the given, naive meaning of life, begins to problematise it. Patočka finds this moment, this historical conversion, in ancient Greece, in the rise of philosophy and politics. Whilst in the prehistorical period, overwhelmed by the first two movements, the experiences of existential shaking were suppressed, politics and philosophy reflect our decision to face the problematicity of our actions and of our existence in general. Patočka finally shows that the new understanding of life and its meaning born in ancient Greece was most supremely formulated in the programme of care for the soul, which he sees as a crucial cultural grounding of European history.[37]

Patočka then recalls his idea of the spiritual person and puts it at the very core of his philosophy of history. Patočka defines spiritual people as those who stay in the centre of the state, who project their care for the soul into a state, and who, thus, enable the historical up-swing. No wonder then that Patočka links the concept of the spiritual person also to the "solidarity of the shaken". As they are capable of a conversion (*metanoia*) – that is, of recognising "what life and death are all about", i.e., "that history is a conflict of *mere life*, barren and chained by fear, with *life at the peak*"[38] – spiritual people have an indisputable responsibility not only for their own lives, but also for the life of their society and for history in general.

The Spiritual Person and Non-Political Politics

For these reasons, Patočka advocates that the spiritual person sometimes cannot avoid an entanglement with politics. Yet the question remains as to what the precise character of this entanglement is.

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35 Patočka Jan, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Chicago, Open Court Publishing, 1996, p. 61.
36 *Ibid*., p. 43f.
37 *Ibid*., p. 82f.
38 *Ibid*., p. 134.

The problem of political engagement was already outlined in Patočka's works from the 1930s. One of its best elaborations can be found in the text *Chapters from Contemporary Philosophy* (*Kapitoly ze současné filosofie*). In this short article, published in 1936, Patočka asks a question about the relation between philosophy and society. In order to introduce his own position, he discusses two examples: firstly, he turns his attention to Aristotle, who understands philosophy as the queen of all disciplines. Any direct participation of philosophy in social life is therefore out of the question. Secondly, Patočka remarks that Max Weber's conception of modern science understands science as merely a means of intellectual and rational analysis which should be free from any values. Science therefore cannot participate in political disputes, which are in fact disputes between different values, world-views and the like.

Patočka himself is satisfied neither with Aristotle's divinisation of philosophy, nor with Weber's degradation of science to a means of intellectual and rational analysis, as both of these approaches exclude philosophy/science from an active participation in social life. Instead, Patočka looked for an attitude which would understand philosophy as an element that can – to some extent – actively shape society, without turning into political power in the traditional sense of the word. Patočka finds a supreme representative of this attitude in Socrates. On the one hand, Socrates was able to keep a distance from the everyday. On the other, he did not ignore the problems and challenges of his time – he was able to speak to his fellow citizens, to problematise what seemed unproblematic, and thus to actively participate in the life of the polis.[39]

In this light, it is not surprising that Patočka's lecture *The Spritual Person and the Intellectual* (*Duchovní člověk a intelektuál*) from 1975 followed the lines that were outlined back in the 1930s. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, Patočka more intensely underlines the problem of the spiritual person's participation in politics. Yet in defining this participation, he faces difficulties: on the one hand, the spiritual person is not a politician in the usual sense of the word; on the other hand, he has to be able to somehow participate in politics when the situation calls for it.[40] In order to overcome this contradiction, Patočka finally turns his attention to one particular concept – in the notes he prepared for the lecture, we find a remark on "non-political politics".[41]

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39 Patočka Jan, "Kapitoly ze současné filosofie", *in* Patočka J., *Péče o duši I*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky 1, 1996, pp. 94–100.

40 Patočka Jan, "The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual", *op. cit*., p. 63.

41 More precisely, Patočka remarks: "The spiritual person and his inevitable politics – non-political politics (…) the sophism of those who pretend to defend the interests of art, literature, science,

Non-Political Politics and Charter 77

In light of the concept of the spiritual person, Patočka's turn to non-political politics seems to be clearly grounded in theory. Yet what remains in the shadows is Patočka's turn to non-political politics in practice.

We have to ask why Patočka himself started to be active in public only in the 1970s. As the article *Chapters from Contemporary Philosophy* – as well as many other texts – illustrates, Patočka was convinced of the philosopher's duty to participate in the life of his society as early as the 1930s. At the same time, there were many impulses that could have provoked Patočka's public action, such as the Munich agreement and the Nazi invasion in 1938/1939 or the Communist take-over in 1948. Yet it seems that until the 1970s, i.e., until the Soviet invasion in 1968 and the ensuing period of normalisation, Patočka had remained silent, at least in the sense of public activity. This implies that the period of the 1970s is of special significance. Some particular incidents must have happened that motivated Patočka to express his own relation to politics, to participate in public affairs, and, finally, to join the human rights initiative Charter 77.

In order to shed light on these circumstances, we have to first focus on the end of the 1960s. More precisely, we are interested in Patočka's analysis of the "mass intelligentsia", most notably introduced in the book *On the Meaning of Today* (1969, *O smysl dneška*).[42] Influenced by the atmosphere of the so-called Prague Spring as well as by optimistic visions of post-industrial society, Patočka was convinced of the crucial role of the so-called intelligentsia. He observed that this intelligentsia had never had such an influence on society before. The rising intellectual class, composed of a mass of educated people that included teachers, writers, poets, students and educated technicians, seemed to form a new social power. What founded Patočka's optimism was the belief that this modern intelligentsia could somehow link modern rationality to spirituality – the intelligentsia could be the leading power of scientific-technical progress and, at the same time, could somehow keep its sense for the deeper, spiritual values of life.[43]

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philosophy against 'politisation.'" See the original manuscript: "Duchovní člověk a jeho nezbytná političnost – nepolitická političnost (…) sofistika těch, kdo předstírají, že hájí zájmy umění, literatury, vědy, filosofie proti 'politizování.'" (Patočka Jan, "Duchovní člověk – rozvrh", *in* Patočka J., *Péče o duši III*, Praha, OIKOYMENH, Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky 3, 2002, p. 488. Translation by Ian Mikyska).

42 Patočka Jan, "O smysl dneška", *in* Patočka J., *Češi I, op. cit.*, pp. 231–338. For a more detailed discussion of Patočka's analysis of modern intelligentsia, see: Homolka Jakub, "Hodnoty moderní inteligence", *in* Hudeček Ondřej, Tomášek Vojtěch (eds.), *Vědomí hodnot*, Praha, Togga, 2015, pp. 53–64.

43 Patočka Jan, "O smysl dneška", *op. cit.*, p. 235f., 245f.

Nevertheless, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, during the time of normalisation, Patočka lost his optimistic beliefs. Despite the fact that the term "intelligentsia" or "technical intelligentsia" is still used in some of his writings,[44] Patočka realised that the sociologically or economically defined social class of the intelligentsia was composed of two different, yet often confused groups of people – on the one hand, there were those for whom spiritual activity was connected to a complex existential attitude; on the other hand, there were also those for whom it was merely an occupation, a way to make a living, and nothing more. In order to underline this difference, Patočka – inspired by Plato's distinction between the philosopher and the sophist – distinguishes between the "spiritual person" and the "intellectual".[45]

Patočka's distinction was provoked by specific events which took place in 1975. Zdeněk Pinc, one of Patočka's former students, claims that the lecture *The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual*, presented on the 11th of April 1975, was a direct reaction to the articles published by Bohumil Hrabal (1914–1997) and Jiří Šotola (1924–1989) in the weekly magazine *Tvorba*.[46] These two Czechoslovak writers, both former members of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers (Svaz československých spisovatelů), were among those who had to face a publishing ban. In order to please the Czechoslovak authorities, Hrabal and Šotola published self-critical and pro-regime statements.[47] In return, they were once again allowed to publish their works.

Despite the fact that Patočka mentions no names, it seems obvious that he was reacting to Šotola's statement in particular. Starting with a self-critique of his own activities in the Union of Czechoslovak Writers, Šotola arrives at a critique of the political activities of writers and intellectuals in general. He presents the claim that a writer should be concerned with literature and nothing else – especially not politics.[48] And this very statement is sharply criticised by Patočka. The reaction to Šotola is most obvious in Patočka's remark that "saying that politics is something unworthy of one's own spiritual activity, that it destroys and frustrates the spiritual activity – this is the worst sophistry imaginable".[49] In opposition to this intellectual attitude, Patočka defines the approach of the spiritual person: "The spiritual person

44 Patočka Jan, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 118, 136.
45 Patočka Jan, "The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual", *op. cit.*, p. 51f.
46 Pinc Zdeněk, *Být ovádem obce*, Praha, FHS UK, 2010, p. 195f.
47 Hrabal Bohumil, "Rozhovor s Bohumilem Hrabalem", *in Tvorba. Týdeník pro politiku, vědu a kulturu*, 8. 1. 1975, 2, p. XIII; Šotola Jiří, "Prohlášení J. Šotoly", *in Tvorba. Týdeník pro politiku, vědu a kulturu*, 2. 4. 1975, 14, p. 7, 12.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
49 Patočka Jan, "The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual", *op. cit.*, p. 63.

is not of course a politician and is not political in the usual sense of this word. He is not a party to the dispute that rules this world – but he is political in yet a different way, obviously, and he cannot be apolitical (…)",[50] because "the spiritual life is not just meditation or the creation of artistic works, the spiritual life is precisely also action based on the insight that reality is not rigid, on recognizing plasticity of reality."[51]

As mentioned above, in order to define this in-between position, Patočka referred to the concept of non-political politics. Yet his reference was not only a matter of theoretical disputes. Patočka also applied it in practice. His engagement in the human rights initiative Charter 77 seems to be a realisation of non-political politics par excellence. Patočka himself paid attention to the explanation of this issue. When he joined Charter 77, he composed several short articles in which he tried to enlighten its meaning. And it seems that he was following precisely the idea of non-political politics as defined in the concept of the spiritual person: on the one hand, Patočka emphasises "that Charter 77 represents no political act in the strict sense, that it constitutes no competition of interference with political power".[52] It is similarly phrased in the very *Declaration of Charter 77*: "It does not form the basis for any oppositional political activity. Like many similar citizen initiatives in various countries, West and East, it seeks to promote the general public interest. Charter 77 does not aim, then, to set out its own platform of political or social reform or change (…)."[53] On the other hand, Patočka explains that on some occasions, a public confrontation with the official authorities – which can be understood as a political act – is inevitable. Human rights violation is surely one of these occasions. However, such activity is not led by an intention to participate in the execution of power as a standard political action would be. Instead, it is an act of responsibility that the spiritual person has to bear – the responsibility that Socrates felt for his fellow citizens and the polis in general. No surprise, then, that Patočka's discussion of the meaning of Charter 77 returns to the responsibility of artists, writers or philosophers, i.e., those who should most notably represent the idea of spiritual life – to put it in Patočka's own (and often quoted) words: "(…) there are things for which it is worthwhile to suffer (…) those which make life worthwhile (…) without them all

50 *Ibid*., p. 63.
51 *Ibid*., p. 66.
52 Patočka Jan, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice", *in* Kohák Erazim (ed.), *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 341f.
53 Charter 77, *Declaration of Charter 77*, https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/628 (8. 7. 2017).

our arts, literature, and culture become mere trades leading only from the desk to the pay office and back."[54]

Conclusion

Asking after the character of Jan Patočka's participation in the human rights initiative Charter 77, the concept of non-political politics, as outlined by the Czech sociologist Miloš Havelka, seems to be a convincing answer. The importance of this concept consists in the fact that it provides a link between Patočka's philosophical work and his life story. The link is most evident in the lecture *The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual* from 1975, which mirrors Patočka's theoretical concept of the spiritual person as well as the socio-political contexts of the Czechoslovak normalisation period.

To summarise, Patočka's lecture on the spiritual person was a reaction to the failure of the Czechoslovak intellectual elites. Whilst in the 1960s, during the time of the Prague Spring, Patočka believed that these intellectuals, forming the new mass social class of the modern intelligentsia, could be a ground for the spiritual regeneration of modern society, in the 1970s, in the period of normalisation, he saw that many (if not most) of them had given up on their spiritual vocation. Therefore, Patočka, implicitly criticising Czechoslovak writers who had published their self-critical and pro-regime statements in the weekly magazine *Tvorba*, recalls the idea of the spiritual person. Referring to a concept formulated in the 1930s, Patočka underlines the existential grounding of spiritual life, and, thus, distinguishes the spiritual person from the mere intellectual. This distinction is further applied to the problem of politics. Whilst the intellectual can distance himself from the political sphere, arguing that man should be concerned only with the matters of his own occupation, the spiritual person cannot avoid his social responsibility, and, therefore, cannot avoid politics all together. On the other hand, Patočka points out that the spiritual person is not a politician in the usual sense of the word. In order to define this in-between-position, he refers to the concept of non-political politics. Patočka's own participation in Charter 77, which followed his critique of Czechoslovak intellectuals, is, then, an expression of non-political politics par excellence.

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[54] Patočka Jan, "What We Can and Cannot Expect from Charta 77", *in* Kohák Erazim (ed.), *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

Finally, focusing on the framework of certain contemporary discussions, Patočka's interpretation of non-political politics represents a very specific version of the concept. Referring to the idea of an existential turn, a conversion that grounds life in problematicity, Patočka understands non-political politics as an expression of the spiritual person's unavoidable responsibility toward society. Yet we have to face the question of its currency. Patočka's declaration of non-political politics is closely tied to the socio-political contexts of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. However, by linking the problem of politics to the idea of the spiritual person, Patočka provides an ideal type of collective actor that could be further developed and applied. The advantages – as well as the disadvantages – of such a concept lie in Patočka's emphasis on its grounding in the existential experience of conversion. Thanks to Patočka's philosophical theory of existential movement, the motif of conversion is precisely elaborated and, therefore, provides a solid theoretical grounding. On the other hand, the moment of conversion itself is very hard to grasp in terms of socio-historical research. It is very closely bound with an individual experience, which is uneasy to catch and analyse. Patočka himself develops his idea of the spiritual person as something that defies all sociological, economical and other categories, and, therefore, its reinterpretation into historical-sociological research is questionable, but also provides an interesting challenge.

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